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AUTHOR	Dale, Angela; Shaheen, Nusrat; Kalra, Virinder; Fieldhouse, E.
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ABSTRACT

Routes into education and employment for young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Oldham, England, were examined. The data sources were as follows: group discussions with Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people at different stages in the educational system and at an early stage of labor market participation; interviews with public and voluntary sector practitioners in employment-related support services; interviews with women from the young women's parental generation; and national and local statistics on application and entry to higher education. The young women demonstrated high aspirations--particularly in relation to their parents' educational and occupational levels--and their rates of participation in post-16 education were considerably higher than for white young people. The young women's parents were strongly supportive of their children's continued education. Although the Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls were still restricted in their access to higher education, their numbers in full-time undergraduate courses had increased markedly. Even those young women who had higher qualifications wanted to make their young children their priority. For some women, this meant changing from full-time to part-time work. Given their employment ambitions, however, it seemed likely that the young women would eventually follow employment patterns very different from those of their mothers. (The

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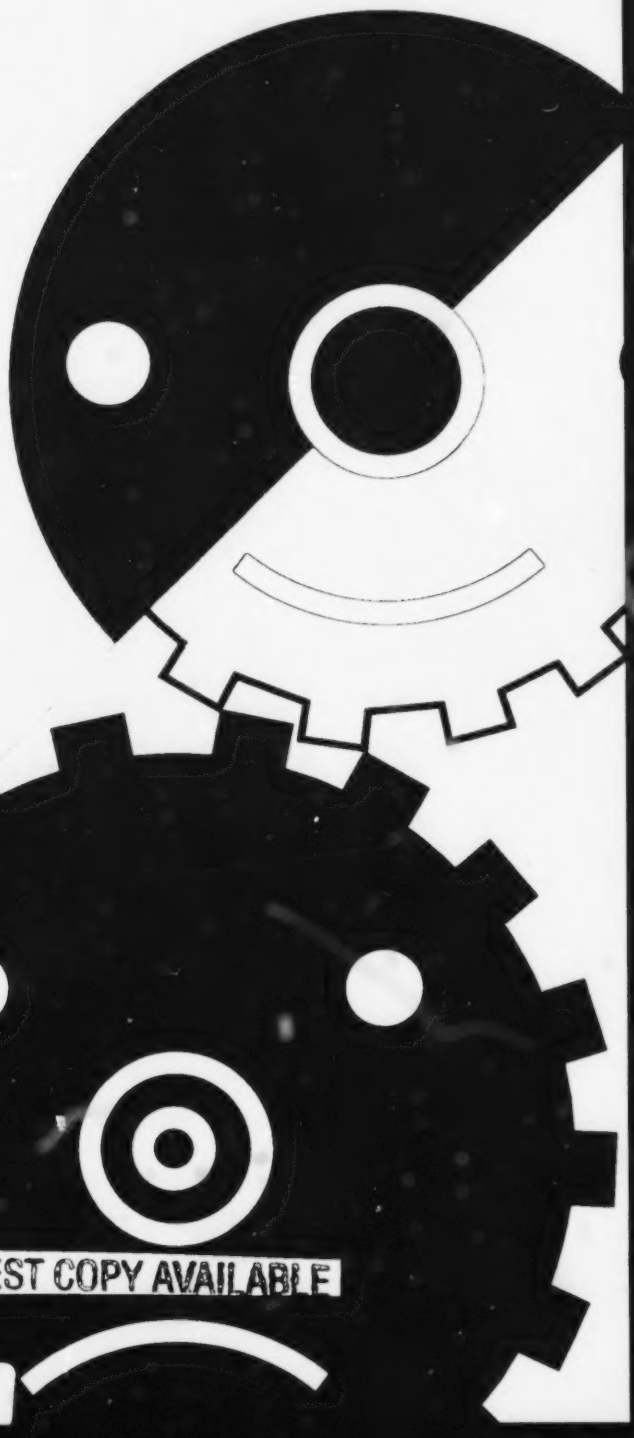

Routes into Education and Employment for Young Pakistani and Bangladeshi Women in the UK

Angela Dale
Nusrat Shaheen
Virinder Kalra
E Fieldhouse

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Angela Dale
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Virinder Kalra
E Fieldhouse

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Professor Angela Dale, CCSR, University of Manchester, Manchester,
M13 9PL Tel: 0161 275 4721 Fax: 0161 275 4722
Email: angela.dale@man.ac.uk

Routes into Education and Employment for Young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in the UK

Angela Dale, CCSR, University of Manchester
Nusrat Shaheen, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Virinder Kalra, Department of Sociology, University of Manchester
E. Fieldhouse, CCSR, University of Manchester

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Address for correspondence:

Professor Angela Dale
CCSR
University of Manchester
Manchester
M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 275 4721
Fax: 0161 275 4722
Email: angela.dale@man.ac.uk

Routes into education and employment for young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in the UK[1]

1. Introduction

There are major differences in the employment patterns of Indian women and Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have low levels of economic activity at all stages of the life course, but particularly for married women and women with dependent children. By contrast Indian women have much higher levels of economic activity showing life course patterns not dissimilar to white women (Holdsworth and Dale, 1997). Amongst the economically active, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women have levels of unemployment (19 per cent for men and 21 per cent for women) higher than for any other ethnic group (Sly et al, 1999).

As Brah (1993) has argued, differences in employment patterns amongst South Asian women are related to a large number of factors, including the timing and reasons for migration, level of education and language ability, as well as the structure of the local labour market and the employment opportunities available. Many young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women educated in the UK have had the opportunity to acquire language and qualifications that was not available to their mothers. Most have also been exposed to western cultural values as well as the traditional Muslim values of their parents and family. Perhaps not surprisingly, there are indications that younger Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, most of whom have been born, or

[1] We would like to thank Shirley Dex for many helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

at least brought up, in the UK, may anticipate very different educational and employment careers from those of their mothers.

In this paper we provide an insight into the educational and employment experiences and aspirations of young Pakistani and Bangladeshi people living in Oldham, in Great Manchester. Oldham has been selected because it has significant Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities - comprising 6.1 and 3.9 per cent of the population of the Borough respectively in June 1999. It is a young population, with a mean age of 21 for the Pakistanis and 20 for the Bangladeshis and projected to double in size by 2011 (Oldham MBC, 1997). This is likely to lead to a substantial increase in the numbers of young people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin going through the educational system and entering the labour market. It is therefore important to gain an understanding of how, and in what way, the educational qualifications and occupational aspirations of these young people differ from those of their parents. Whilst our focus is primarily on young women, much of our empirical evidence relates to both women and men in order to provide an understanding of gender differences. In particular we aim to establish the extent to which young women are likely to differ from their mothers in their employment preferences.

Background to the research

The Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in Britain are relatively recent migrants and come from predominately rural areas. Many older women followed their husbands as dependants once the latter found work. Settlement is in very specific geographical areas which reflect the

reasons for migration. Oldham is typical of many of the declining industrial areas of the north-west which sought cheap migrant labour during the 1950s and 1960s to work in the declining cotton and woollen industries. The continued decline of the textile industry during the post-war years, and the near total collapse of manufacturing in the early 1980s, has led to very high levels of unemployment in the local labour market. Unlike other regions, this decline in the manufacturing and textile sectors of the labour market has not been compensated by a rise in the service sector. This has impacted especially hard on the more recent migrant groups who have experienced considerable discrimination in attempts to obtain the few jobs available. Former ethnic minority mill workers turned to restaurant work and taxi driving which now form a main source of employment for these men in Oldham (Kalra, 2000) although unemployment and ill health is very high amongst older men.

On arrival in the UK the first generation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women found themselves in a country which assumed English-speaking in all public life and where non-western modes of dress were treated with suspicion or derision. Their lack of qualifications and lack of fluency in English placed considerable barriers to finding employment in the formal labour market. Domestic responsibility for children and, sometimes, for other family members, means that most women have little time for paid work. In addition, cultural norms tend to place responsibility for financial support on men rather than women and it is often seen as reflecting badly on a man if his wife has to go out to work.

This brief sketch outlines some of the barriers to employment faced by this older generation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. However, many of these women now have children who

were born in the UK, have experienced the UK educational system and are entering the labour market. In this paper we are concerned with the educational and occupational aspirations of this younger generation. In particular, we ask whether the younger generation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women will follow the employment patterns of their mothers'. This poses the further important question, which we are not able to answer in this paper, of whether the local labour market will provide these young women with job opportunities at a level commensurate with their abilities and qualifications. The specific questions we seek to answer here are:

What are the aspirations of young people and parents in terms of educational achievement?
What are the barriers to achieving these aspirations? How does this vary by gender?
What are the occupational aspirations of young women and men?
How do young women envisage their future in terms of work and family life?

The material used in this paper is based on group discussions with Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people at different stages of the educational system, and young people at an early stage of their market participation. We have also undertaken interviews with public and voluntary sector practitioners in employment-related support services, and with women from the parental generation who are able to provide some insights into their preferences for their own children.

Appendix 1 provides more details of interviews, all located in Oldham, in Greater Manchester. Qualitative material is supplemented with survey data from Oldham and national

statistics on applications and entry to higher education.

2. Educational background

National-level data and data specific to Oldham show that Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people achieve rather lower school qualifications at GCSE level than white young people. There are, however, gender differences with Oldham data showing girls more likely than boys to get five or more GCSEs at grade A-C (Kalra et al, 1999).

Despite their lower attainment at GCSE, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are more likely to stay in education post-16 than white young people. This was evident from the 1991 Census which showed that, overall, participation rates for 16-19 year olds were 42 per cent for boys and 47 per cent for girls. There was a larger gender difference amongst Pakistanis (62 per cent boys and 51 per cent girls) in those staying in education post-16 than for the Bangladeshis (about 52 per cent for girls and boys). Similar results can be seen in figures from the 1997 Oldham Labour Force Survey (Table 1).

Table 1 about here

However, Asian young people, generally, are more likely to be re-taking GCSEs and less likely to be doing 'A' levels than the white group. Data from Oldham show that South Asian young people moving into post-16 education have lower level qualifications than the white population although girls get better GCSE grades than boys and are thus in a better position to

move directly to A-level study (Kalra et al, 1999).

The 1991 Census showed that participation rates amongst 16-19 year olds were higher for those South Asians who were UK born (Drew et al, 1997). Amongst Pakistanis, 62 per cent of UK born 16-19 year olds were in full-time education by comparison with 53 per cent of those born outside the UK; comparable figures for Bangladeshis are 70 per cent and 48 per cent. We may, therefore, expect substantial increases in young people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities participating in post-16 education in the coming years.

Given the depressed economic circumstances and the low level of qualifications amongst many of the parents of Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people this commitment to education is remarkable. Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people are less likely than whites to have a household head in full-time work. In the North-west region the 1991 Census showed that, amongst households with dependent children, only 33 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heads of household were in full-time work by comparison with 57 per cent of the White population. Amongst those in work, employment tended to be in low skilled jobs, particularly in distribution and catering. Generally, participation rates for ethnic minority groups are much less strongly related to class background than for the white groups. For example, Drew et al (1997) using 1991 Census data, show that only 30 percent of 16-19 year olds with a family head in RG Class IV or V were in full-time education by comparison with 55 percent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people from these classes. This commitment to education was also borne out amongst the young people interviewed, the majority of whom indicated that their fathers were either unemployed or retired and their mothers were 'just housewives'.

Other research has also reported a much higher commitment to education amongst ethnic minority groups than from the white working class (Smith and Tomlinson, 1989; Penn and Scattergood, 1992).

In summary, statistical evidence paints a picture of South Asian young people as more likely to remain in post-compulsory education than white young people although with rather lower entry qualifications. There are, however, gender differences such that Pakistani girls, in particular, are less likely to remain in education than boys although both Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls are better qualified to move onto A-level study than the boys. Background evidence, both nationally and more locally, indicates that there is a weaker relationship between staying on rates and parental resources for these minority groups than for the white population.

We consider whether there has been an increase in the uptake of degree-level education amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people. UCAS statistics for applications by home students to degree courses for 1994 to 1999[2] are shown in Figure 1. There is a marked increase amongst South Asian groups and this is especially so for Bangladeshi and Pakistani women. From 1994 to1999 there was an increase in applicants of 83 per cent for Bangladeshi women and 60 per cent for Pakistani women. By comparison, there was a fall in applications from white men over this time period and only a small increase amongst white women. Figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, Table 10A) give the numbers of

[2] For the 1996 entry the number of applications each applicant could make was reduced from eight to six. However, the date in Figure 1 refer to applicants rather than applications and should not be affected by this change.

UK domiciled full-time first-year students on degree-level courses by ethnic group. This shows an increase of 95 per cent for Bangladeshi women and 71 per cent for Pakistanis women between 1994/5 and 1998/9. The increases for B and P men from 1994/5 to 1998/9 are 21 per cent and 44 per cent respectively. It is evident that these increases far outweigh the growth in the student-aged population over the four year time period.

There is also an indication what young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are narrowing the gender gap in uptake of higher education. Amongst first year UK domiciled full-time degree level undergraduate students for 1994/5, girls represented 38 per cent of both Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. By 1998/9 this had risen to 42 per cent and 43 per cent, respectively (HESA, Table 10.A). There is no sign that the very large rise in applications by Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls in recent years is slowing down. White girls have now overtaken white boys in terms of entry to under-graduate courses and formed 53 per cent of full-time degree level undergraduates in 1998/9. However, it is only a decade or so ago since white women, also, were significantly less likely than men to take an under-graduate degree course.

The statistical evidence suggests that there are very real gains being made by Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people and that women, in particular, are narrowing the lead held by men in terms of entry to degree-level courses. There is, however, concern about the over-representation of minority ethnic students in new universities by comparison with the older and more prestigious ones. This was highlighted by Modood and Shiner (1994) and has been identified by the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000) as a factor likely to disadvantage young people from minority ethnic groups, relative to white

young people, in obtaining employment. We now turn to the views of the young people themselves about their aspirations and ambitions in pursuing further and higher education and the views of their families.

3. The value of education

Generally, those young people in education saw it as the only means by which they were able to get a worthwhile occupation. Perhaps surprisingly, they did not give negative reasons – such as the lack of alternatives - for staying in education. Instead, they portrayed qualifications as a very positive route to obtaining a job. However, most boys and girls were very aware of the difficulty in competing with white young people in the labour market and felt that they had to demonstrate that they were not just as good but better. As one undergraduate explained, this was only possible by getting good qualifications:

> 'you have to be like the best to get the job, if you think, if you have average grades then everyone else has average grades and you are not going to get the job, but you have to be better than, a lot, a lot, lot better than the other candidates to the job' (*Bangladeshi male, undergraduate)*

The lack of jobs available to young people without qualifications, together with the recognition that if you were Asian you needed to be better qualified than your competitors, are therefore both powerful reasons for continuing in education beyond the age of 16.

Boys often mentioned the alternative jobs which required no qualification: these were in warehouses, restaurants, take-aways and taxi driving. Many boys in further education also

work after college and at weekends in restaurants and take-aways and therefore have direct experience of the alternative jobs available without qualifications (Kalra et al, 1999). Some of the girls in further education also had experience of the unskilled jobs available, through working evenings and weekends, packing in warehouses or in local supermarkets.

The role of higher education in promoting social mobility is well established and has been found by others to be an important factor in explaining the value attached to education by many ethnic minorities (Modood, 1993; Allen, 1998). The young people in our study were remarkable in their occupational aspirations in relation to the social and economic position of their parents.

4. The role of parents and family in influencing educational choices

Parents and the wider family played an important part in the educational choices of young people. In some cases, parental pressure resulted in continued study when the young person would rather have left education. Sometimes parental wishes led to particular courses of study which were not the choice of the young person him or herself. In other cases, parents were reluctant for daughters to continue in education and preferred them to make an early marriage. We discuss the issues of parental wishes in more detail below.

Parents who were aware of difficulties their sons and daughters would face in the labour market were often very keen for their children to gain qualifications :

my parents want me to study cos they say you're not gonna be successful in life without education nowadays ...as far as I know so I am gonna stick to college and see how it goes ...*(17 year old Bangladeshi boy in FE)*

Parents, too, emphasised the importance of education in terms of the future life chances:

'It was my wish that they (children) study as much as was possible so that they'd build their own future. In life, education is essential.' *(46 year old women, Pakistan, 7 children)*

In addition many parents felt that family status was enhanced by having a child who was well educated and in a high status occupation. This is consistent with other research that suggests that the qualifications obtained by Asian young people give status to their families (Singh, 1990; Allen, 1998). Parents and other family members therefore played an important role in young people's career choices. In some cases, an elder sibling or relative at university provided an example of what could be achieved, and this, together with the parents' emphasis on a university education, influenced a young person's choice to continue with education. The following extracts from a discussion with Pakistani and Bangladeshi young men in further education indicates some of the influences:

'my cousins, one's a barrister and one's becoming a doctor and so that's why (aiming for university)'

'well my sister encourages me a lot... she's a bi-lingual teacher...so she says stay in education ...stay in college, cos I was gonna leave college after the first year...but she goes that you know it's good education GNVQ it's not gonna be like A levels.'

'my parents want me at least to go to university and get some sort of degree...as one of our councillors says... .from every Asian household he wants a graduate...that's what he wants to see by the end of the millennium'

'it is getting close...there is a lot of people as far I know from Bangladeshis and Pakistanis (who) are honours (graduates)...a lot of people from each family coming out with a degree and it's encouraging for us cos if they got the motivation then we can do the same if we put our mind to it'

'I just look at my uncle...he's becoming a doctor - well near enough - and the advice he gives me at the moment anyway'

'my brother is an IT teacher ...he works in a school in Huddersfield and he knows everything about computers and he says go get studying and all that, so hope for success'
(Young men, 17/ 18 in FE, in group interview)

It is evident that, for some of these young men, the support and encouragement they were receiving from their families were deciding factors in continuing in education. For some young people parental pressure to remain in education was felt to be too much and sometimes hard to resist:

'they expect too much ...parents, really, not my parents but so many girls I know, parents expect too much , like to get good grades they force you to go into studying when you don't even want to study... I know a few girls like that in college...and that they don't think that she may not be good at studying she may be good at something else...' *(17-year old Pakistani girl working as a shoe-shop assistant)*

Whilst parental support was obviously of great importance, parents did not always take into account alternative non academic routes to success or whether the young person's ability

matched the level of education aspired to. Some young people felt pressurised into staying in education when they would rather have left. Other research based in Oldham (Kalra et al, 1999), found that most Asian young people named parents and other family members as having a greater influence on their career choices than career advisors or teachers. The research identified a lack of contact between parents and the school or college, with little discussion between parents, teachers and careers advisors. This meant that parents tended not to meet the teachers of their children, although older brothers sometimes attended parents' evenings (op.cit). This lack of contact between parents and school – perhaps reflecting language difficulties or different expectations of Asian parents - may (wrongly) signal to teachers a lack of parental interest which, in turn, can have consequences for how well the child does at school. It also means that parents get little feedback from teachers on their child's performance in school. A lack of dialogue between the careers service and parents may result in young people applying for courses, such as medicine, without the necessary A level grades to gain acceptance. The following quote demonstrates that some young people feel that their parents lack knowledge about the complexity of the education system. It also highlights their difficulty in explaining to their parents why they wish to pursue alternative professions.

'Most of the families, that's all they want: be a, be a doctor, be a doctor'

'I think that parents should be more aware of A levels and things what we want'

'...you know doctor, they don't understand that there's other things with high status as well...its not just doctor with high status what you do...they need to know more about what's happening'

'that's why when we have kids we'll be more understanding because we'll know what's happening'

(Females aged 17/18 in FE)

'my dad wants me to be a teacher and my mum wants me to be a doctor and I want to be a pilot'

'All Asian parents want you to be a doctor or a nurse'

(Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls aged 14-15)

It is well established that there are strong preferences within the older Asian community for particular vocational professions – for example, medicine, law, business studies, accountancy - and this is reflected in subject choice of university application (Modood and Acland, 1988). Figure 2 shows selected subject preferences of first-degree applicants for 1999. These illustrate that medicine, in particular, is still more popular amongst South Asian applicants than white applicants. Medicine is recognised as having high status within South Asian communities, with scope for high earnings and self-employment. Analysing national level data Modood and Shiner (1994) found that Asian students, had, on average, lower entry grades than white students but applied for courses which required high grades. This suggests that some applicants may have been ill-advised to apply for medicine. Allen (1998), in a survey of full-time minority ethnic under-graduates in 1995, also found that some students felt that their parents lacked knowledge of higher education institutions and were not in a position to provide good advice. There is, therefore, a need for more liaison between parents, schools and the careers service to ensure that young people's plans for higher education are based on a good understanding of the education system and their children's abilities.

5. Gender differences

There was wide support from young people and from many mothers for the view that education was important for both girls and boys. Nonetheless the responsibility for providing for the family was firmly located with boys – and this seemed to be accepted by both the boys and girls interviewed. However, this did not necessarily devalue the role of education for girls. Higher education was often portrayed by girls and by parents as having intrinsic value and was thus not inconsistent with the expectation that girls would get married and have children at an early age. Girls also referred to the importance of having a career, particularly in terms of providing some independence and something to fall back on in the event that their future partner was unable to provide for them or if the marriage ended. Girls also expressed the role which education played in allowing them to retain their independence:

> '.. and if they (girls) want to be independent, you know, then they should carry on (with their education). I think most of them do carry on, because of their independence, they don't rely on the partner or anything like that'. *(18-year old Pakistani girl at FE college)*

This, too, was a concern for some mothers who wanted to ensure some economic independence for their daughters:

> 'Look at my older daughter, she's got married but at least she's got a degree in Pharmacy and she doesn't work but if in the future for some reason she needs to work, she won't have to think what am I going to do because somewhere, someplace she'll be able to get a job. With education, you can at least do something.' *..(Pakistani, 46, 7 children)*

The priority given to vocational qualifications has already been discussed. Research based on

white women has shown the value of vocational or occupationally-specific qualifications in facilitating re-entry to employment after child-bearing, particularly in the public-sector (Elliott et al, 2000). For young Asians having a specific vocational qualification is likely to provide one means by which labour market barriers can be lowered, either at first entry or on subsequent re-entry following child-bearing.

Whilst for girls education as a means to a job was often seen as a safety net to fall back on when needed, for boys the importance of getting a good job was much more urgent. One group of boys in further education described the pressure which they felt, not just for themselves but also because of their responsibilities to their families:

> 'Expectations are quite high, sometimes people can't meet the expectations.'
>
> 'In my family, right, ... my family expects me to be one to go out get a degree, do this, do that, and everyone's always expecting me to do this, do that, and sometimes, I'm getting wound up by the pressure.'
>
> 'Then it's the responsibilities you have, when you go home. Okay you've got to look after your family, you've got to get .. The guys, they've got to have a good job, they've got to get the money and they've got to do the shopping they've got to keep paying mortgage the bills.'
>
> 'They've got to do everything okay right, keep all the family happy, if they've got a problem you've got to sort it out, if anything arises it's down to the guy to sort it out. That's what I'm saying it's like you've got loads of pressure on your head.' *(Males ages 17/18 in FE)*

The pressure to succeed, described above, was, however, tempered by the greater freedom that boys were allowed by comparison with girls. Whilst for boys a strict code of conduct was

deemed to exist it was much less strictly maintained than for girls:

> 'I think guys they could go out you know where ever they want now. With girls, they have to make excuses at home tell the parents where there gonna go, and what time there going to be back and everything it's like that.' *(18-year old college girl, A)*

> ' I think girls put their head down in school and college and guys just chill out'
> *(18-year old college girl, B)*

These views were repeated on many occasions, with girls and boys being very aware of the difference in the amount of freedom they were allowed. As hinted at above, this was sometimes suggested as a reason for girls achieving better at school – they worked harder because of the additional restrictions that were placed on them. One group of boys suggested that because girls were required to spend their evenings at home they therefore spent more time doing homework and acnieved better results. These issues are discussed in more detail in the following section.

6. Maintaining family honour

For much of the Asian community in Oldham it was important that girls should avoid any behaviour that might damage the family honour (*izzat*). If the girl behaved in a way that damaged the family honour her family would suffer in the community and she would no longer be seen as an acceptable marriage partner (Afshar, 1994). This had implications for the continuation of post-16 education for girls. However, no similar restrictions were mentioned

for boys. During interviews with the women in the parental generation it became clear that, whilst the notion of honour was widely accepted, there were considerable differences in the ways in which it impinged on girls. For the most traditional families it meant that girls were not allowed outside on their own and going to FE college or university was forbidden. By contrast, in other families, girls were encouraged to go to university, even if it meant living away from home and parents' trusted their daughters to behave in an appropriate way. Two quotes from mothers of adult children illustrate the different ways in which this was addressed. In the first, despite the importance of family honour, there is no restriction on daughters pursuing higher:

> Parents' izzat is extremely important and they (children) need to know that. I'm not saying that they can't study away from home. I say they can even go abroad as far as America if they want to and my husband and I agree on this. They can study wherever they want but the condition is that they remember the door of their parents' home and that they will be returning through that door the way they left. And if they follow this advice, then I don't think they'll lose out in life, ever. The world will respect them and parents will also respect them. *(46 year old women, Pakistan, 7 children, most have been to university)*

She went on to explain the implication of this attitude for her relationship with her daughters:

> Now my daughters I know where they are, even late in the evening, even though they live away from home. Even though they're at university, if they are about to go out for the evening, they always ring me up and tell me that we're going to a party or wherever and they say that they'll tell me they're going to this place at this time and they're going to be back home at this time. My other daughter studied in London and this one in Luton and I always knew where they were and now one's studying in Leeds and one studying in Huddersfield and I always know where my daughters are. It's about trust really, isn't it?

She went on to recall the community pressure on her not to allow her daughter to go to university:

> Remember in those days, people used to say that your daughters will run away and no one could even imagine sending their daughters so far. For many months I didn't sleep myself thinking about sending them to London and Luton. *(46 year old women, Pakistan, 7 children, most have been to university)*

The traditional views of the community are, perhaps, evident from this quote from a mother with teenage children:

> Around here, there's a young girl, about 20 years old and she recently got married and people didn't even know they had a daughter of that age, because she never went out anywhere and just stayed in the home. She had younger sisters who went everywhere with their mum, but she never went anywhere; she was that faithful she never went anywhere. So as you see, in our Islam it is strongly recommended not to go out of the home, but these days, it's become a custom wherever you look, everybody goes out and everybody works. *(Mother, mid-40s, born in Pakistan from rural background, with teenage children)*

Some of the young women interviewed had experienced these restrictions and were determined that they would not impose them on their own children. A Pakistani women in her early 30s, now working full-time recalled with bitterness how her parents stopped her from going to college although her younger sisters had succeeded :

> *What was the reason for not going to college?*
>
> 'The college catered for the two sexes in the same environment.
>
> But a lot of things changed, because my sisters were more determined than me. I was the eldest, I sort of thought, alright, - I used to take it out on my Mum, but not say anything to my father, but my sisters

actually spoke up…

All my upset went through my mother, not through my dad. I never saw him around really, when I was stopped from college, I was at home, it was me and my mum throughout the day, I'd take out my resentment on her.' *(Pakistani, 31, full-time working)*

If a girl remained at home under the supervision of her family there was less chance that she would engage in activities which could damage the family's reputation. For a girl to continue in post-16 education it was necessary for parents to be confident that this would not bring dishonour on the family. In interviews with girls who had remained in education we were told more about the process of negotiation with parents that some had undertaken before being allowed to continue in education. Continuing FE education in Oldham posed less of a threat than going outside Oldham; the FE and 6th form college are both in the centre of Oldham and parents would quickly hear if their daughters stepped outside accepted norms of behaviour. However, we were told that some parents escorted their daughters to college in the morning and met them at the end of the day – not always realising that girls were free to go outside college at lunch-time.

Girls reported that their parents were often concerned to see Asian girls wearing western dress to college. Where girls wore traditional Asian dress this signified that they subscribed to the values and codes of behaviour of their community and provided an assurance to their parents. Thus in negotiating to be allowed to go to college it was often important for girls to agree to wear traditional clothes. The community also acted as a powerful force imposing conducts of behaviour. Both young people and mothers referred to this:

'some people, like, they talk about you .. Oh, your daughter is doing this or ...'

'they say how's your daughter ... and they say they've gone to college and they are studying this .. and then they say: why do you do that? .. why don't you just get them married? *(Focus group of Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls aged 14-15)*

Greater concerns were felt if further education meant travelling outside Oldham because it was harder for the family to retain control over the girl. Also, girls living away from home could not be given family support and help if they faced difficulties. A number of young women talked about their strategies for providing their parents with the necessary reassurances. In this context the importance of role models was frequently mentioned. If an older sibling or cousin had successfully completed higher education this often gave parents much more confidence. The girl's achievements brought status to her family with the result that other parents were more likely to allow their daughters to follow a similar route. Whilst there is obviously scope for conflict between children and their parents, a number of young people still in education said that they were able to talk to their parents and that it was usually possible to reach a satisfactory agreement. Those young people continuing in education had, by definition, reached a resolution with their parents. However, our interviews with married women included several instances where they had been prevented from continuing their education.

A number of girls suggested that the acceptability of a university education for girls had increased in the last few years as a result of other young women having successfully achieved degrees. This is certainly supported by the analysis of UCAS and HESA data discussed

earlier. In this respect, girls in Oldham were fortunate in having a number of universities within daily travelling distance. However, it was clear that going to university in Manchester often required considerable negotiation with parents. Therefore if higher education is locally available Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls are likely to have more opportunity to continue their studies.

7. Combining marriage and family life

We have already seen how some parents feared that allowing daughters to remain in education post-16 could damage their marriage chances and the family honour. In interviews with 'older' women we were told that parents would try to get their daughters married quickly if they feared any 'trouble'. A 22-year old Bangladeshi woman recalled how she had so many marriage proposals as a young girl that her parents wanted to get her married quickly and safely – which they did when she was 17. She herself was very determined that her two young children would have the educational opportunities that she was denied.

Many of the young women interviewed were very aware of the difficulties they may face in reconciling education with a suitable marriage. They accepted without question that they would get married and have children and they discussed how this might be combined with study - recognising that they might well be expected to be married at the usual age of entry to university. Some girls were clear that they wanted to get their education before marriage, as after marriage their negotiations for higher education would be more circumscribed by their new husband and his family:

'You can't do two things at once, get married and study as well it's too much. Too much pressure from both sides ... Because like you know, sometimes I've heard from families, like, when girls get married, the guys go: I don't want you to study, ... so we thought we're better off getting our studies then think about life, get married.' (*Female aged 18 in FE)*

Sometimes, however, we were told that a girl may get married first, if her husband and his family accepts that she can return to study. However, this may not always be seen as acceptable.

The work-family balance

Whilst the students interviewed speculated on how they might combine paid work with domestic responsibilities they all assumed that they would eventually get married and have children. There was, however, some discussion over the respective role of husband and wife and whether a girl would continue to work or to study. Generally prospective parents-in-law were seen as playing an important role in deciding this. The following discussion highlights the potentially varied expectations of young women regarding the combining of marriage and employment. The assumption was that a decision to work after marriage would be subject to negotiation:

'I suppose when you get married it'll depend if you mother in law lets you work or someat'

'my sisters got married and they're still working and I probably will as well'

'its up to you really'

it all depends on what kind of husband you've got cos if you've got a chilling husband then you're all right

but if you've got a strict husband its different'

'some husbands are all right like I know this girl she's married and she's going to Uni this year and her husband doesn't mind and he says yeah you can go ... and they haven't got any kids yet cos her husband says to her that you finish your education and then we'll plan kids and he's from abroad as well so that's something'. *(Females aged 18 in FE)*

This discussion indicates the power accorded to both husband and mother-in-law but, at the same time, a realisation that continued employment is a possibility. There is also an implication that a husband from abroad – Pakistan or Bangladesh – is likely to have more traditional expectations than a husband living in the UK.

The young single women who had left education, all of whom had been educated in the UK, and had a range of qualifications, saw paid work as bringing positive benefits. It was something which, at this stage of their lives, they wished to pursue. They gained independence and self-esteem from a job and some also saw a job as giving freedom and the ability to 'get out of the house' . This can be understood in relation to the 'traditional' view that women should not take paid-work outside the home. It is noteworthy that, as with the students above, they all accepted without question that they would get married and have children. They also foresaw that marriage was likely to lead to some compromises and they would lose some of their individual freedom, particularly if they moved into the household of their parents-in-law.

Younger married women varied not just in the extent of their labour market participation but in whether this was their own choice. It is significant that those woman who had higher level qualifications and the prospect of a 'good' job appeared to be in a much better position to resist

any pressure to give up their job. Those who were married were likely to have a husband who accepted that they should continue to work In the interviews, women with higher qualifications were often keen to distinguish between tradition and religion and thereby demonstrate that there was no incompatibility between being a devout Muslim and taking paid work. This was extremely important for women who wished to affirm their adherence to Islamic values – and to uphold the honour of their family – but who did not want to be bound by the traditional values of what was seen by some as a rather old-fashioned and narrow-minded community.

By contrast, there were other women who were much less able to resist the traditional expectations of mothers-in-law. In the most extreme case, parents-in-law exercised control over one woman's movements to the extent that she saw paid work outside the home as an impossibility. Whilst in general the views of the parental generation are likely to be more traditional than those of their children, it is clear that the power exercised by parents-in-law is negotiated and that education and employment are both significant in giving daughters-in-law bargaining power and confidence.

All the women with university degrees expressed a strong commitment to the labour market but also emphasised the importance of giving enough time to children, particularly when they were young. For these reasons, part-time working was often cited as the best option, sometimes with a period away from employment whilst their children were young. These patterns, of course, are very reminiscent of those of white women and suggest that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women may, in the future, seek part-time working as a way of combining

child-care and employment. The relationship between educational qualifications and employment for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women is dealt with in more detail in Dale et al (2000).

8. Conclusions

Educational qualifications are highly valued by the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. The young people in our study demonstrated high aspirations, particularly in relation to the educational and occupational level of their parents. Post-16 education rates were considerably higher than for white young people, despite the limited resources of most families.

Generally parents are strongly supportive of the continued education of their children although we identified the need to find a mechanism to facilitate a closer liaison between parents, schools and the careers service. This would help particular parents to direct their children towards more appropriate subject areas. Family and community support was of great importance, particularly for boys. Girls who wanted to continue into further and higher education faced a more complex situation. On the one hand, their family and community accorded considerable status to educational achievements but, on the other hand, it was important to achieve this without jeopardising the family honour. This led to a dilemma for many families wanting to pursue both values and resulted in the use of various negotiating tools in the process. There was, therefore, evidence that girls were still restricted in their access to higher education. Nonetheless, national statistics show a marked increase in the numbers of young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in full-time undergraduate courses.

Girls still in education, as well as the younger women who had left education, generally wanted to remain economically active after marriage. However, there was a recognition that this required negotiation with both their prospective husband and mother-in-law, although women with higher qualifications were in a stronger position to achieve a successful outcome. Even women with higher qualifications wanted to prioritise their children during the early years and managing this whilst also retaining their status in the labour market presented further difficulties. For some, changing from full-time to part-time working seemed to offer a solution. It is evident that, if the employment ambitions of these young women are realised, that will follow employment patterns that are very different to those of their mothers'. It is, however, of vital importance that the labour market provides these young women with job opportunities at a level commensurate with their abilities and qualifications.

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Appendix 1

Phase 1: Group discussions with young people

Target Groups	No. of Bangladeshi and Pakistani participants	
	Girls	Boys
Young people aged 14-15 in secondary education	8	8
Young people aged 16-21 in Further Education	11	11
Young people applying to university aged 17-21	10	8
Young people economically active, not in full time education 17-22	8	8

Phase 2: Summary of interviews with adult women

	Pakistani				**Bangladeshi**				**Total**
	Children		No children		Children		No children		
	EA	Not	EA	Not	EA	Not	EA	Not	
Not in English		9	-		1	7	-		17
English	6		10	1	2	2	5		26
Total	6	9	10	1	3	9	5		43

EA = economically active in the formal labour market; Not = Not economically active

Table 1 Percentage of young people in full-time education in Oldham

	16-18, male	16-18, female	19-24, male	19-24, female
White	50.5	52.1	23.9	17.0
Pakistani	77.8	53.0	45.8	29.2
Bangladeshi	72.2	72.2	26.5	19.1
Other	(94.5)	100.0	*	*

Source: Oldham Labour Force Survey

* base numbers less than 50

() base number 52; all other percentages based on numbers over 100.

Figure 1: Percentage change in home applicants to degree courses, 1994-1999 by ethnic origin (UCAS table G1)

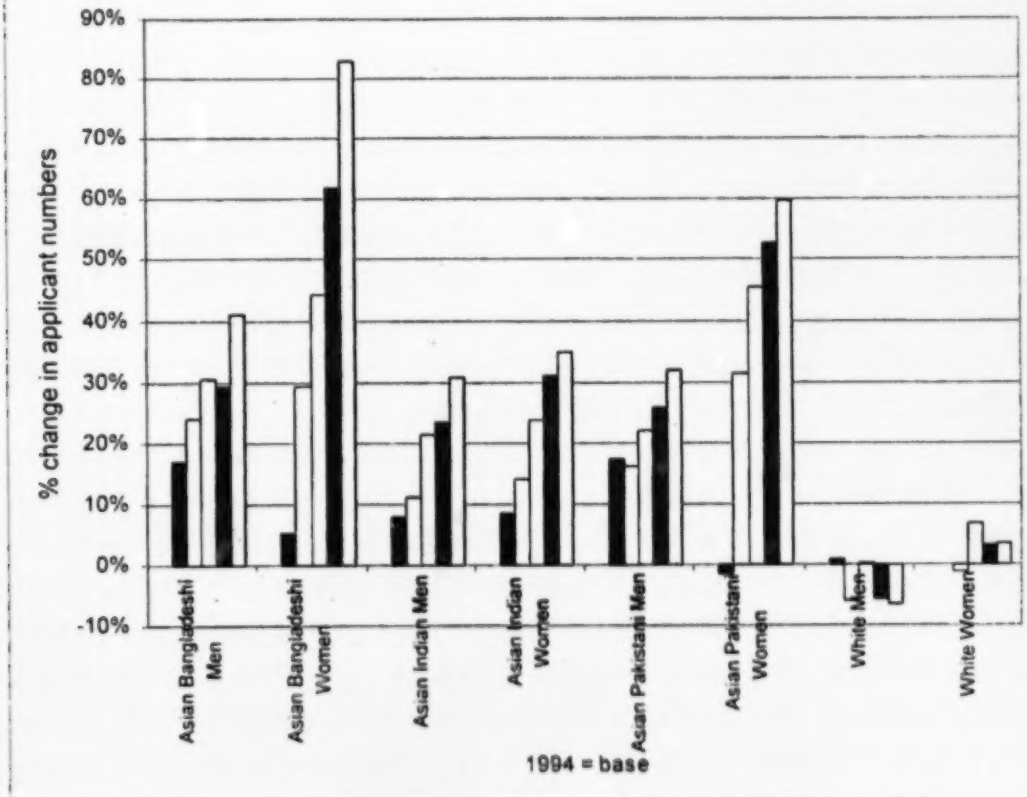

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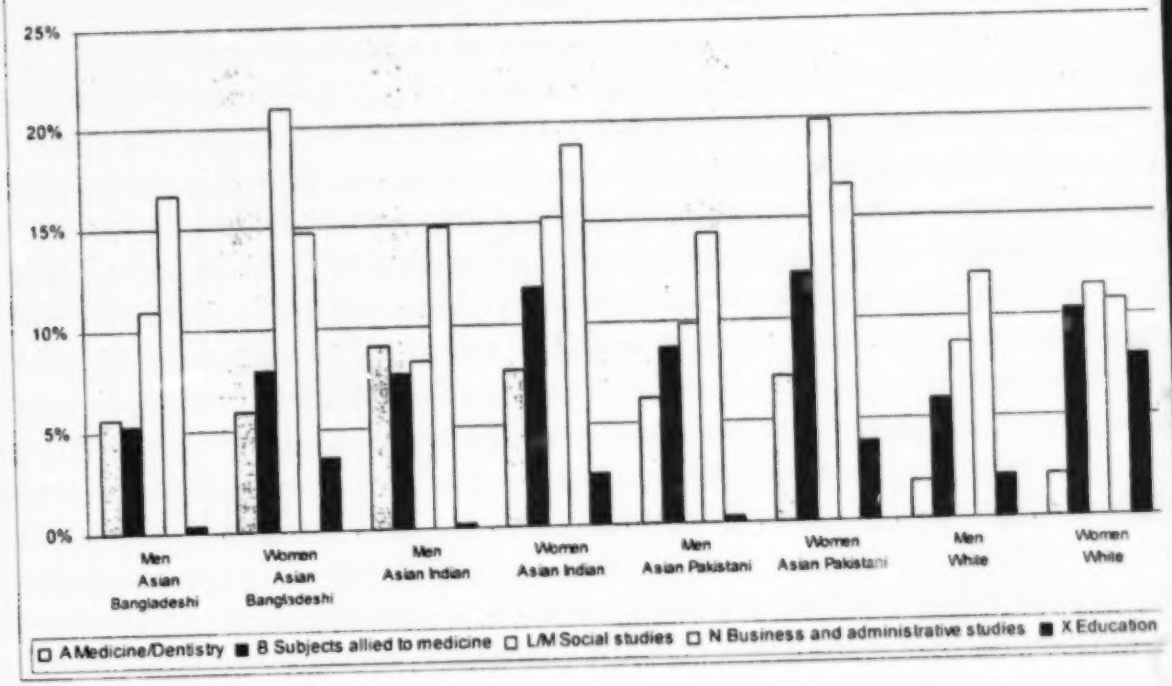
Figure 2: Ethnic origin by subject group for home applications to first degree courses, 1999



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